

Paris, 27 February 1951.

Dear Ernst, dear Nelly, dear everyone,

many thanks for all your interesting letters and reports which we received yesterday. So much of our time here in the office has to be spent on rather 'theoretical' questions, that it's a real joy to get lively personal letters from the people who are doing the real work of SCI – the volunteers on the services. It makes our office side of the job make more sense, helps us to see the whole thing a bit more 'in the round'. Do remember that we've always delighted to get such letters from any of the volunteers who can manage to make time to write them, not only from the leader and headsister. But now to business

International Delegate Meeting:

As you said nothing in your letters about a delegate for these meeting, we thought you had decided not to send anyone. Then this morning we have received a letter from James Michie, saying that he would like to attend the IDM. We have the impression from James letter that he has not had very much experience of SCI, and as he is a short-term volunteer we have no idea how likely he is to take part in other SCI services. Now, it may be that in spite of this James would have a very valuable contribution to make to the Delegates' Meeting, and that he would also bring back to Donaueschingen a real stimulus. But our idea in suggesting that you might send a delegate from D. was rather that you have there a number of volunteers who have considerable, and varied, experience of SCI and whence because of this experience, would have a very special contribution to make to our discussions. If you all, as a group, think that James is the person best qualified to make this contribution, then we are very happy to accept him as your delegate. If not, then I'm afraid it's No, James. You see, this is strictly Delegates' meeting - normally, delegates from national branches, and it is only quite exceptionally that we have suggested this year that there might be a delegate from a service because of the fact that there were a number of long-termers at Donaueschingen. If, on the other hand, the group decides that it wishes to send some other delegate to the IDM, it is still not too late. Whether your delegate is James or somebody else, we should be prepared to pay maintenance expenses while he (or she) is at Ludweiler and to pay travelling expenses in one direction. We should suggest that you might return by 'hitching' (or does that work out as expensive as the train in that part of the world? I have an idea that the last people who tried it weren't very successful). But please let us know at once if you decide to send someone - and of course Meta should know.

UNESCO training course:

Sorry, but I'm afraid you're too late; There are no more vacancies.

AIWCP training camp at Le Chambon:

There is still room for one person. We should be pleased that someone who is sure to be working in SCVI services this summer should go - perhaps Ernst? You could get help with travelling expenses; perhaps, as we have suggested for the IDM, you might hitch-hike back to Donaueschingen (not to Le Chambon, as it will be essential to arrive there at the right moment). If you wish to go to Le Ch. please send back the application form at once, and let us know how much financial help you will need - i.e. the cost of the journey D - Le Ch. Maintenance at Le Ch. would also be paid.

Gerda Jensen for Algeria:

If Gerda wants to go to Algeria, her application should be sent by Haakon Larsen, as secretary of the Danish branch of SCI, to the Algerian secretariat. I don't think there is urgent need for a woman volunteer in Algeria at the moment, and I can't help wondering whether Gerda wouldn't be more useful if she stayed on at Donaueschingen? I'm not sure how long she has been there, but I am quite sure that the service at D. urgently needs that a few volunteers, at any rate, should stay for quite long periods so that they can assure some degree of stability in the life and spirit of the group. And that brings us to another question that troubled us very much in your yesterday letters.

Nelly, Ernst and Roger all say that they want to leave Donaueschingen at the same moment to go to Schleswig-Holstein. Incidentally, if the UNESCO training course had not happened to be full, Gerda and Svend Hansen would have been leaving at just about the same moment. Obviously, you on the spot are much better able to judge than we are, and I can't believe that you would take such a decision lightly without trying to see the effect it might have on the service; but to us here, remembering how over and over there have been really bad moments at D. just because there has been a sudden exodus of experienced volunteers, the idea seems, to say the least of it, an unhappy one. I wonder why you all want to go to Schleswig? Because you think you can really be more useful there? Or just restlessness, a personal desire for change and variety? Only you can answer these questions, and, in the light of the answers decide whether you really want to press to be sent to Schleswig. Have you already written to Meta about it? And to your own national secretariats? Or was your note to us the first airing of this idea?

As to the further suggestion that you should all three go to Finland at the end of June, we are frankly very unhappy about it. Nelly, at any rate, knows as well as we do, and the others don't need a lot of imagination to grasp the point, that one of our most serious problems is to find for all our services an adequate nucleus of experienced and reliable volunteers. In fact, I personally am absolutely convinced that it is the most serious of all our problems. You know, too, that we have counted on you long-term volunteers to form a pool of such reliable volunteers, that we believe that you were going to be a real solid strength to SCI. And then, pouf ! one breath of romance from the North, and three of you want to go skipping off at once to Finland. SCI needs you urgently for our summer services. André has written to Nelly; I think everything he says to her, except the special appeal that she should consider going to Algeria, applies to all of you, and as he had said it much better than I can I say no more!

André is waiting for this typewriter, so good-bye for the time. All our best wishes to you all.

Yours very sincerely

Dora Begert